**FAO’s Role in Agricultural Extension as a Contribution to Agricultural and Rural Development in India**

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**ABSTRACT**

Significant growth in agriculture is pre-requisite for engineering country’s economy on fast track. Support to agri-based and expanding export market besides ensuring national food security needs focus in agricultural growth. The combined effect of an unabated population growth, improved family income, increasing industrial needs and rising export requirement has been causing drastic changes in the demand pattern for agricultural commodities in the liberalized era. By the year 2010 and 2020, we need to reach a production level of about 247.8 MT and 296.6 MT of food grains respectively from the present production level of 206.39 MT (2004-05). The projected production must emanate from improved resource productivity. Since, the output of new technology gradually slowed down and rather, for more than two decades no new break-through technologies have been offered. Substantial yield gaps still exist in major crops with the available technology. Research indicates that the available technologies have not been adopted effectively and efficiently, further more notable unevenness and distortions were observed wherever adopted. Additionally, the main global forces of change that are affecting or are likely to affect the existing structure, mandate and practices of national agricultural extension systems are globalization and market liberalization; privatization; commercialization and Agribusiness; democratization and participation; environment concerns; information technology break through; sustainable development; Eco technology and genetic engineering; market led extension; diversification and value addition integrated, multidisciplinary and holistic development. It is true that the growth in the agriculture sector is not the sole responsibility of the extension service. Many other factors including policy interventions, price incentives, and institutional support and market facilities also play a significant role. Since agricultural production is entirely in the hands of the farmers, the extension service has the central role in informing, motivating and educating the farmers about the available technological, managerial and market opportunities and enable them to improve their farm productivity and income.

**Key words:** FAO, Agricultural Extension, Agricultural and Rural Development, Globalization, Food security.

**A**gricultural extension in terms of functions encompassed, purposes, programme content, and clientele has varied from country to country over time. Out-of-school education may be the only function or one of several, such as supply of inputs, arranging credit and marketing facilities, collecting statistics, and enforcing regulations. The purposes may be to increase production, to increase income, or even to include actual improvement of family living (made possible by the increased income) and education for self-reliance in seeking and effecting improvements in the future. Programme content may comprise production of a particular crop or all crops, livestock, forestry, or fisheries, singly or in some combination. Coverage of any of these subject-matter areas may include marketing, other economic and management aspects and, in the most comprehensive system, all of these plus conservation, maintenance of environmental quality, and social considerations such as nutrition, population growth, and general improvement in family life. The clientele addressed may be all men and women, adult and young farmers, or only some of these categories of rural producers.

According to Swanson (1984), agricultural extension is a service or system which assists farm people, through educational procedures, in improving farming methods and techniques, increasing production efficiency and income, bettering their levels of living and lifting the social and educational standards of rural life. A definition, revised in the light of the World
Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD) and other developments since 1973, might refer specifically to men, women, youth, and the most disadvantaged groups in general, encouraging and involving rural people’s own organizations, enhancing individual and collective self-reliance, and environmental and population issues. For more than forty five years, FAO has been supporting farmer learning. Governments around the world are being assisted in establishing and operating extension systems and programmes within the framework of national economic and social policy, government structures, and the availability of natural and financial resources. The rights, socioeconomic circumstances, and needs of the intended beneficiaries are additional determinants of the nature of assistance rendered. Diversity among and within nations in all these factors has meant that there could be no single universally applicable approach to the provision of extension.

FAO's Role in Agricultural Extension as a Contribution to Agricultural and Rural Development

1. The Policy Guidelines: The principles and programme of action prepared placed special emphasis on growth with equity and poverty alleviation, on the need for involvement of the high proportion of the rural population—women, landless producers, the poorest and smallest farmers, youth—who have been largely bypassed and failed to benefit from past development efforts. The guidance for extension work is summarized in The Peasant’s Charter and Declaration of Principles and Programme of Action (1981). Education, including training... and extension services are fundamental needs for human development in rural areas and also for expansion and modernisation of rural economies... No less essential is the creation and expansion of training and extension networks for both men and women to develop and improve skills and to increase productivity and income-generating capabilities. There is also need for establishment of effective linkages between extension and problem-solving research. In view of the great urgency of these needs and the magnitude of the task in relation to the resources of developing countries, low-cost techniques of education and training for short periods merit close consideration.

Limits in FAO’s Assistance to Agricultural Extension

FAO’s Areas of Technical Competence: Organization assists extension development in various ways. All technical division contributes subject-matter content for programmes and training. Divisions in the ‘Forestry and Fisheries Departments’ go further and develop programmes and methodologies for extension, specifically adapted to their respective technical fields. The ‘Nutrition Division’ has developed training curricula, teaching materials, and methodologies. Media support is available from the ‘Development Support Communication Branch of the Information Division’ to enhance communication techniques and to increase effectiveness in delivery of extension messages to farmers. Major assistance in establishing extension systems is provided by the Investment Centre, which prepares large-scale projects for consideration and funding by the World Bank and other sources of investment funds.

Requests for Assistance from Member Countries: FAO can help a particular country only on the request of its government. Each government decides if and when help is desired, the nature of this help, and the sources from which it will be accepted. Requests for immediate, small-scale help of short duration come directly to FAO and are met through use of its own resources. Involvement in large-scale and longer term projects is based on an invitation to FAO to serve as executing agency for projects funded by the government’s own budget or from external resources available from a variety of sources.

Availability of Financial Resources: FAO has been enabled to shift the focus of its programme to action in the field, assisting governments in implementing projects specifically designed to address local problems. This field work is of the utmost importance in extension, where organizational structure, programmes, and methods must be designed within the framework of the local culture, economic and social policy, and resources availability. A financial limitation of FAO, not well understood, is that the Organization is not an investment institution and cannot make funds available for physical facilities such as buildings and large-scale equipment or for payment of local salaries. Through the Investment Centre, the Organization can and does help governments prepare proposals for submission to lending institutions, which can help meet these critical needs like World Bank/IDA, IFAD, and other financial institutions.

Cooperation with Other Agencies: Another type of limitation recognized by FAO is that comprehensive competence in agricultural disciplines alone is not
sufficient to achieve the goals of agricultural and rural development. Accordingly, FAO cooperates with other providers of technical and financial assistance, particularly members of the United Nations (UN) system, and encourages coordination between government agricultural ministries and other agencies and institutions within countries. Frequent informal consultation and two formally constituted interagency mechanisms are particularly important in promoting cooperation among UN system agencies, including UNESCO, ILO, WHO, UNICEF, WFP, IFAD, World Bank and others.

**Scope of FAO Activities in Support of Agricultural Extension:**

**Regular Programmes:** Five types of Regular Programme activities are undertaken:

- **Advisory Services:** Advisory services are rendered to governments on all aspects of the development and operation of Agricultural Extension Systems (an average of one hundred mission per year).

- **Support to Field Programmes:** The Agricultural Education and Extension Services (ESHE) participate in the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of projects with varying components of agricultural extension and training. Backstopping missions are also organized to provide assistance and guidance to field projects, in particular to those nationally-executed (on the average two visits annually).

- **Regional and International Fora:** During the period 1988-1992 the Agricultural Education and Extension Service organized and implemented through its Regular Programme: 5 Regional Round Tables, 5 Regional Workshops and 3 Expert Consultations (of which the Global Consultation on Agricultural Extension, Rome 1989). The main topics discussed during these fora were related to strategies of agricultural education and training, extension methodology, low-cost extension campaigns, extension training curriculum development, integration of population education in extension programmes, and environment and sustainable development.

- **Training:** In 1991 there were 331 FAO projects which reported to have conducted at least one training activity during that year with a total of 1,619 activities where 85,805 trainees participated of which around 30% were women. Agricultural topics and associated extension methodology were the main subjects of training.

**Documents and manuals:** Studies and analytical work during the 1980-93 period resulted in the release of more than 100 reference documents and training manuals. Technical information in agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and nutrition was presented in ways particularly suited for extension use. Several documents offered guidance on alternative approaches to the provision of extension services and on State-of-the-art methods. Work with women and youth and in special subject-matter fields such as population and shifting cultivation were the subjects of other publications.

**Field Programmes:** The total number of field operational projects assisted by FAO during 1992 reached 1,463. During the same year, the ‘Agricultural Education and Extension Service’ (ESHE) alone provided technical backstopping in extension and training through some 235 field projects, TSS-1, TSS-2 and regular programme activities including technical supervision to about 100 field experts and 65 consultants. Among these projects approximately 32% are principally extension and training (80% or more of project budget are in extension and training) and 68% are projects in which extension and training is a component (no less than 20% of project budget is for extension and training). These activities have contributed significantly to strengthening agricultural and extension systems which in turn have improved skilled and abilities among agricultural manpower in the 86 countries concerned. Through its participation in project formulation missions and TSS-1, the same Service has identified and developed around 38 new or reformulated projects and project profiles of a value of approximately US$ 47 million.

**Pre-Investment:** Through preparation of projects for consideration and funding by the World Bank/IDA, IFAD, regional development banks, and other financial institutions, FAO’s support of investment offers the possibility of bringing FAO extension experience to bear on a substantial scale.

**Problem Areas in Achieving Effective and Affordable Systems:**

- **The General Constraints:** At the highest political levels, the lack of a strong and continuing commitment to the policies and resource allocations essential to agricultural progress and the well-being of rural people is a major obstacle to development. This observation applies with particular force to meeting the needs of the masses of rural people who own little or no land and live in extreme poverty.
a. Weak political commitment to agricultural and rural development is manifested in a variety of ways. Price policies for farm products, as well as investment in physical and social infrastructures, are heavily tilted in favour of the urban dweller and industry. Earning foreign exchange may be accorded higher priority than feeding the poor, even though land and other resources, including extension services, are directed to cash crops. Even farmers engaged in production of these crops may have poor incomes because of duties imposed on imported inputs needed for production and low prices resulting from export levies.

b. Problems of government structure can be a serious impediment to effective extension. Most governments are highly centralized. The diversity in the agricultural resource base and in the cultures and educational levels of people all point to the need for a decentralized approach to extension with heavy local involvement. Sometimes the structure of the ministry of agriculture and its coordination arrangements do not ensure essential complementary support of research, credit, farm supply, and marketing services.

c. Civil service systems militate against agriculture in general, often giving higher pay for equivalent jobs to employees in other ministries. In too many rural areas, secondary and even relevant primary level education is inaccessible. A further difficulty for extension is the scarcity of agricultural schools to train manpower to meet the requirements of agricultural and rural development programmes. The result is either that extension posts are not filled with rural men and women or that they are filled by people with inadequate educational qualifications.

d. Finally, there is the ever-present insufficiency of government funds to meet all the worthwhile demands. The agricultural sector, even though usually the major contributor to national income, rarely enjoys a favoured position in the line of claimants for government resources. Agricultural extension services, as newcomers among government departments and as users of funds for human resources development, may do even worse than their parent ministry. All of these general constraints to the expected output of extension services are beyond the control and the influence of the extension administrator.

The Problem Areas Internal to the Extension System:

a. Establishing the policy framework and legal basis for the provision of agricultural extension services.
b. Organizational structure for establishing or improving the extension system.
c. Planning and managing implementation of the programme.
d. Choosing effective and affordable extension methods.
e. Staff selection, training, support, and conditions of service.
f. Establishing linkages with other services and facilities for agricultural and rural development.
g. Reaching the disadvantaged groups—women and youth, and, more generally, the rural population are living in poverty.

Strategies and Future Directions for Improving and Strengthening Agricultural Extension:

1. Obtaining Policy Commitment and Mandate.
2. Widening the Scope of Responsibility.
3. Helping Disadvantaged Groups.
4. Applying Demand-Driven, Participatory Approach Methodology.
5. Intensifying Planned Use of Multi-media Communication Support.
6. Increasing Assistance to Institution-Building.
7. Improving Funding Support to Extension.

CONCLUSION

To maintain sustainable rural development, several regional development agencies, national governments, international development organizations and NGOs are putting in their best efforts. The things which have been focused upon include, advisory services to farmers and forest holders, creating awareness about economic values of forests, modernization of agricultural tools and equipments, introduction of new process, products and technologies, emphasis upon infrastructure development etc. New methods have also been encouraged for farming in barren lands. Most of the farming land remains unused during no-crop season in underdeveloped countries. To improve that, cyclical production of different crops is encouraged so that land does not remain unused. Farmers are also being supported by launching numerous agro-environment
schemes. Income generation and equal growth are likely resultants of such initiatives. These initiatives are being taken in not only developing countries but in developed countries as well. And FAO like apex institutions will be mild stone for global agriculture and rural development.

REFERENCES

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